

City of Olympia  
Public Works Department



# DIVERSITY PLAN

April 2005



## Ad Hoc Diversity Committee

(May 2002 – June 2003)

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Background .....</b>	<b>3</b>
◇ Why the Department Began Diversity Work	
◇ Formation of Committees	
<b>Diversity Basics.....</b>	<b>4</b>
◇ Diversity Vision Statement	
◇ Definition of Diversity	
◇ Establishing a Foundation for Diversity	
◇ Importance of Diversity	
◇ Employee Rights and Responsibilities	
<b>Recommended Action Plan .....</b>	<b>8</b>
◇ Understand	
◇ Resolve	
◇ Celebrate	
<b>Result Measures .....</b>	<b>13</b>
◇ Do We Look Like our Community?	
◇ Are Our Recruiting and Selection Efforts Fair and Effective— Free of Barriers?	
◇ What are Employee’s Attitudes and Feelings?	
<b>Next Steps.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Resources .....</b>	<b>17</b>



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# City of Olympia Public Works Department

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## BACKGROUND

### Why the Department Began Diversity Work

During the Department's strategic planning in the spring of 2001, employees expressed a desire for a workplace that addresses their needs for safety, compassion, understanding, recognition, respect, and pathways to growth and learning.

A new strategic direction to become an employer of choice emerged from these discussions. Being an employer of choice means having a workplace where there is a focus on the needs of employees; an environment where employees feel safe and are treated with respect. It is also a workplace where employees can openly celebrate who they are without having to compromise what makes them unique by feeling pressure to "fit in."

Dr. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., who is widely recognized for his ideas and research on diversity, said it best when he referred to diversity as, "...an environment that works for all employees."

In September 2001, the Employer of Choice Goal Advancement Team concluded that diversity is critical to create a supportive and compassionate work environment for all employees, and is a key factor that will help eliminate workplace fear. The Team further stated that the Department will only be able to attract and retain qualified employees if the Department accepts diversity and becomes more diverse.

### Formation of Committees

In May 2002, the Leadership Team formed an Ad Hoc Diversity Committee comprised of Department employees that was charged to *"...develop an action plan that outlines a strategy to more clearly understand the challenges of diversity and recommend ways to help the Department achieve the goal of becoming an employer of choice through diversity."*

The Ad Hoc Diversity Committee developed a Draft Diversity Plan for the Department, and their work was completed in June 2003. A Diversity Committee was then formed by the Public Works Leadership Team. Members of the Diversity Committee included representatives from each Division of the Department, as well as AFSCME.

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The Diversity Committee began meeting monthly in February, 2004. The Charter of the Diversity Committee was to refine the draft Diversity Plan, and to guide its implementation in the Department.

Both committees used a consensus decision-making style, with voting as a fallback method. The Committees also tried to model the behaviors being developed during the course of their meetings.

## DIVERSITY BASICS

### 1. Vision Statement of a Diverse Workplace

The Public Works Department's diversity vision statement includes an explanation of what we envision a diverse workplace to be like and a compelling reason that explains why diversity is important. It is also easily memorized by employees.

This vision statement was adopted by Leadership Team in September 2004:

*Achieve organizational excellence through an environment in which the strengths and differences of each individual are understood, valued, and respected.*

### 2. Definition of a Diverse Workplace

A diverse workplace is one where:

- The workplace is free of discrimination of all kinds;
- All employees value the differences and similarities among them;
- Employees feel they are treated fairly;
- There is a high level of trust; and
- Employees are welcome, supported, and able to perform at their best.

#### Definitions

*Value the differences:* To appreciate the background, experiences, and beliefs of others as they use them to offer unique ideas for a particular issue.

*Welcome:* The initial and ongoing capacity of a group to make those in their midst feel comfortable and valued.

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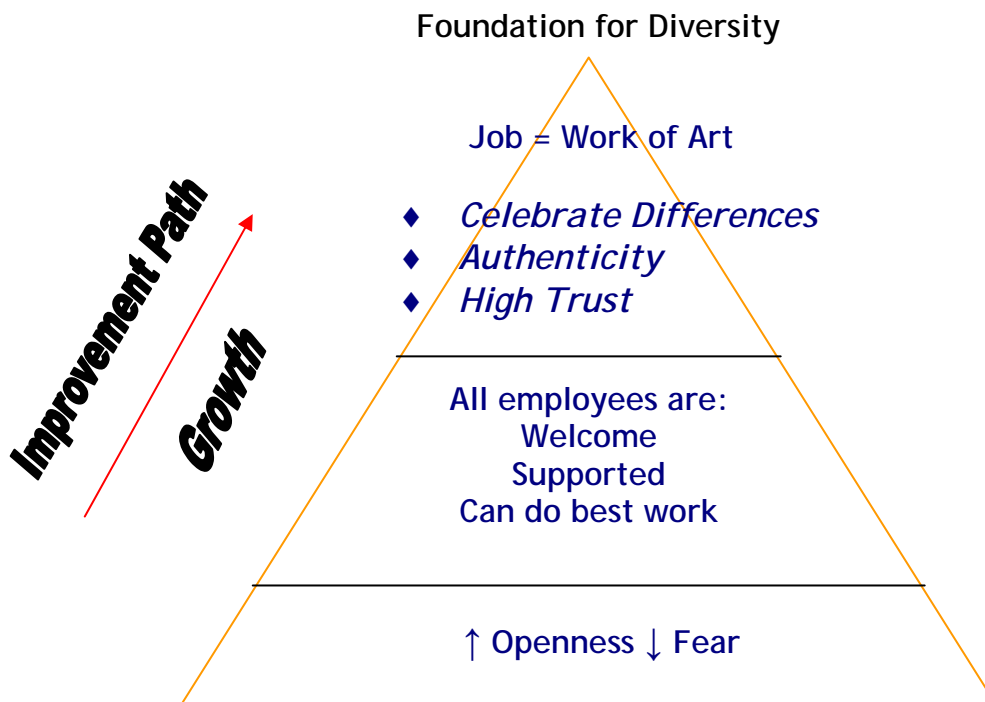
**Discrimination:**

Prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment against an individual or group of individuals based on their gender, sexual orientation, marital status, race, color, national origin, citizenship status, creed, religion, age, actual or perceived disability, political ideology, or other aspects of human differences.

### 3. Establishing a Foundation for Diversity

Diversity is a very complex topic and has many layers of meaning, understanding, and viewpoints. Achieving the Department's diversity vision will take many years, and be evolutionary, not revolutionary. It is hoped that this plan will establish a foundation for diversity to thrive in the Public Works Department. That foundation is the creation of an open and fear-free work environment where honest communication is encouraged. It is important to send a clear message to all that discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated in the workplace and will be dealt with firmly.

The following triangle represents the improvement pathway which will lead the Public Works Department to become a workplace where employees can do their best work. The base of the triangle, or foundation, is the establishment of openness and a reduction in fear. At the top of the triangle, employees experience a high level of trust, and take great pride in their work.



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#### 4. Importance of Diversity to Customers, Employees, and Department

Diversity is important to our customers, employees, and the Department in the following ways:

##### Customers

Diversity is vital to a healthy organization. It contributes to a high performance workplace where we are able to provide better services to meet the diverse needs of the citizens we serve, and we are creative at solving difficult problems. The demographics of our community are changing; by responding to our customer's changing needs, we become a more diverse organization.

##### Employees

When I as an employee embrace diversity, I listen to and value others. I believe in others' strengths and I focus on what is good in them; in return, others will value me. Additionally, I communicate clearly, respectfully, and honestly.

##### Department

Diversity is an important component of becoming an employer of choice. Having a diverse workplace helps us retain quality employees. Our workplace is fun, compassionate, and supportive, and helps all employees work through change in a positive way, while providing valuable services to our customers.

#### 5. Employee Rights and Responsibilities

In order to achieve a diverse workplace, employees will need to behave in certain ways. The responsibility for achieving these behaviors will apply to all employees, regardless of their position status in the Department.

##### All Employees

- Live the core dimensions of respect, empathy, genuineness, and specificity in all interactions with people.
- Know self first, having an awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses.
- Coworkers and managers candidly discuss employees' concerns about changes.
- Seek to understand others' viewpoints.
- Do not accept or listen to gossip or negative talk. Gossip hurts three people; the speaker, the listener, and the one being talked about.

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- Offer apologies and forgiveness to one another.
  - Accept one another's statements about their situation and intentions (following the "face value" rule) - people accept what's stated as the "real reason."
  - Deal directly with each other about conflicts.

#### **Supervisors and Managers - in addition to everything above**

- Use their independent judgment to create environments of inclusion.
- Serve as good teachers and coaches to employees about exhibiting the positive behaviors listed above.
- Have an awareness of the impact of the failure to personally exhibit these positive behaviors and have a sense of strong personal accountability as formal organizational leaders.
- Are *not* expected to be perfect but they are expected to seek assistance from others in order to deal with the emotional demands of the job.
- Are clear about what they are asking from others, what the benefits are from what's being asked, and where a person can go if there are problems.

#### **Leadership Team - in addition to everything above**

- Ask for input when it will be utilized and communicate how, in fact, it was used.
- Work together to marshal resources (time, money) to support training and other work needed to reduce fear and enhance inclusion, including using outside helpers.
- "Train the trainers" in the behaviors and skills needed to improve trust levels.
- Serve as mentors to the Diversity Vision, both personally and organizationally; viewed as "champions for this change."

#### **Director - in addition to everything above**

- Serves as "grand champion" of the effort.
- Develops a refined sensitivity to the impact of his and others' communications.
- Provides a safe environment in which others can give him feedback directly.
- Asks for staff level feedback on communications.
- Makes sure systems are in place to ensure clarity, resolution, and rewards actually happen.

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## RECOMMENDED ACTION PLAN

The recommended action plan centers on making the Department's Diversity Vision real to employees. This can be accomplished by focusing on three areas: understand, resolve, and celebrate. The action plan is framed on these three concepts which must work together and support each other.

### Realizing Diversity "Our Vision"

CELEBRATE

UNDERSTAND



RESOLVE

MAKING DIVERSITY **REAL** TO EMPLOYEES

### Understand

How can we communicate so that we understand each other?

Employees will gain greater understanding of diversity and the Department's expected behaviors if the Department takes the following actions:

#### U-1. Communicate the Diversity Plan to Supervisors

During a quarterly meeting, the Leadership Team, in partnership with the Diversity Committee, will have a session with supervisors to explain the Department's diversity vision, behavior expectations, and result measures. This meeting will be a time to discuss the tools supervisors will need to begin to propose and discuss the issue of diversity with employees.

#### U-2. Communications and Team Development Training

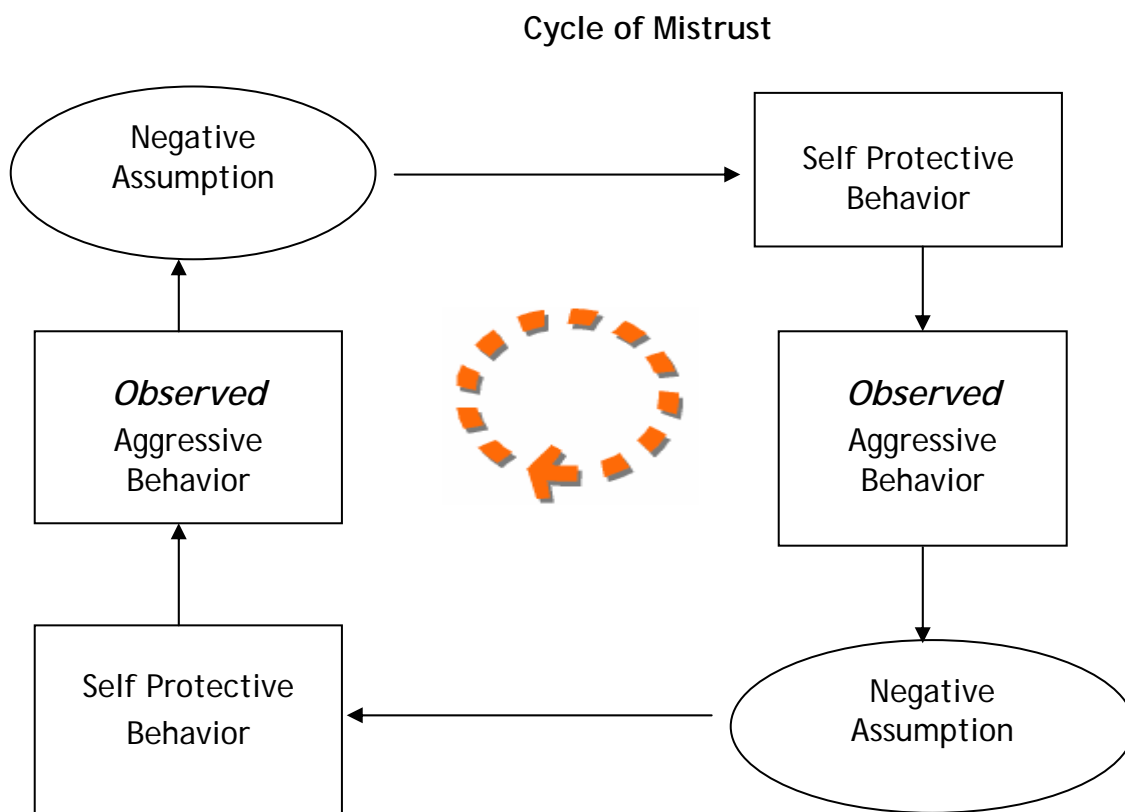
Continue the Department's efforts to train and educate all employees how to handle or confront inappropriate behavior and disagreements with a coworker so the situation can be taken care of at the moment. All Department

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employees will begin receiving training with Dr. Eric Allenbaugh in January, 2005. This training was selected because it focuses on the individual, as well as team and organizational development (Attachment A). Ninety to one-hundred-twenty days following the initial three-day workshop, there is a one-day follow-up training. Employee groups will be formed to continue working on issues introduced during the workshops. Employees will be expected to use the behaviors presented in these workshops in the workplace.

### The Cycle of Mistrust

Daniel Oestrich, co-author of the book *Driving Fear out of the Workplace*, developed a powerful model, "*The Cycle of Mistrust*," shown in the figure below. This cycle illustrates how making assumptions about someone's behavior can influence the way we treat them. They, in turn, interpret our behavior negatively and react accordingly. This model recognizes that people too often mistakenly assume intentions from actions, and illustrates the importance of communications training.



Source "*Driving Fear out of the Workplace*"

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U-3. **Employee Orientation and Education**

Add a step in the Department's new employee checklist where supervisors explain expectations of behavior, work culture, and diversity with each new employee and provide them with a copy of the Diversity Plan.

Partner with Human Resources to develop an ongoing education program for all employees that helps them identify and apply tools to respond to both the visible and subtle forms of discrimination, racism, sexism, and offensive and exclusionary behavior.

U-4. **Ongoing Evaluation and Results**

Develop a reporting system to share with employees, on at least a quarterly basis, the Department's result measures. The Department must determine who is accountable for collecting the information, who receives the information, and who reports it.

U-5. **Develop Employee Bill of Rights and Responsibilities**

The Department needs to establish clear behavior expectations for how employees will treat each other. This would update the current Team Pride and Customer Service Commitments, which were last revised in 1991.

Some of our current values that should be reinforced include respect, specificity, genuineness, and empathy. The list of "Employee Rights and Responsibilities" (above) should be used to help develop the Bill of Rights.

Other behaviors that need to be addressed include not tolerating any form of discrimination (which is consistent with the City's Administrative Guidelines for Personnel Administration) and how employees will resolve disagreements.

We recommend that the Leadership Team involve employees and AFSCME in the development of the Employee Bill of Rights and Responsibilities so that it will be a meaningful document that will be recognized by all in the Department.

U-6. **Employee Communication and Involvement Plan**

The committee recommends that the Leadership Team, in partnership with the Human Resources Department and the Diversity Committee, develop employee involvement tools that begin a safe and effective dialogue on the Department's

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diversity vision. The goal of this dialogue is the first step in a longer process to create openness for employees to share their true feelings about diversity. Some suggested tools include:

- Develop small group (6-8 people) discussions about case studies that deal with the issue of diversity. These discussion groups can happen within each section but should be small enough to allow a safe environment for open sharing. We recommend that supervisors facilitate these meetings to maximize employee comfort and to continue building relationships between employees and supervisors.
- Facilitation training. We recommend that every section supervisor attend City-approved facilitator training, prior to engaging employees in discussions about diversity. The emphasis must be placed on giving supervisors the skills to encourage openness, create a safe environment, and be non-judgmental.
- The Diversity Committee is developing four training modules that supervisors can use on to reinforce the importance of diversity. The modules focus on key messages, including those provided by Jon Townsend during Diversity Training received by Leadership Team, Supervisors, and the Diversity Committee in April, 2004 (Attachment B). The modules also incorporate key messages from the Team Development training all employees received in 2005.

The goal is for employees to recognize subtle forms of exclusionary behavior such as avoidance of contact, condescending and patronizing behavior, blaming the victim, and the denial of cultural differences by requiring employees to “fit in.”

## Resolve

How do we resolve conflict with each other?

Disagreements and misunderstandings between employees should be handled at the lowest possible level. This helps to create healthy relationships. At Public Works, we encourage employees to take personal responsibility for dealing with others when they have problems with them. However, it is sometimes necessary for a neutral third party to help two people, or a group of people, work through challenging and sometimes highly emotional issues.

Sometimes employees are uncomfortable raising issues to the level and attention of a supervisor and would prefer another avenue to address their concerns. Therefore, we recommend the following process be formally implemented.

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- R-1. **One-on-one communication.** Every disagreement issue should start with direct communication between fellow employees, co-workers, and/or supervisors. The Committee recommends that employees implement the Partnership Coaching technique which was taught at Dr. Eric Allenbaugh's Team Development Training. Not included in this are performance-related issues that must be addressed by a supervisor and/or any form of harassment or violation of the City's Administrative Guidelines for Personnel Administration. There are very specific processes to handle these issues.
- R-2. **Mediation.** While one-on-one communication is the preferred form of resolution, it is not always possible. Mediation is an informal, constructive, and cost-effective way to negotiate differences and resolve disputes (Attachment C). Trained mediators act as impartial facilitators. Mediation would be used when one-on-one communication was attempted and did not resolve the issue to both parties' satisfaction.

The City applied to participate in the Interagency Mediation Program (IAMP). Currently, this is made up of State agencies, each of which provides mediators to be part of the pool.

Unfortunately, the IAMP determined in March 2005 that there would be too many administrative challenges if they opened their organization up to non-State agencies at this time. However, if they should change direction, an IAMP representative will contact the City.

Fortunately, the Thurston County Dispute Resolution Center is located in Olympia and provides reasonably-priced mediation services. The Committee recommends that the Department contract with the Dispute Resolution Center for mediation services.

## Celebrate

How will we recognize and celebrate our diversity?

Celebration and recognition in the workplace is an essential way of keeping morale high and building a sense of community. Of course, these are also important elements of managing for diversity and becoming an Employer of Choice.

- C-1. **Celebrations** would be fun, exciting, and joyful. They would build a sense of familiarity among employees, with a focus on achieving our vision of diversity. Examples of such celebrations include:
- Ethnic fairs or potlucks.
  - Team games or cooperative activities that support diversity.
  - All-Department meeting activities that are inclusive of all.
  - Upbeat articles in employee newsletter or regular employee e-mails.

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- C-2. **Recognition** would acknowledge contributions made by individuals or teams achieving the diversity vision. The Diversity Committee would collaborate with the Department’s Recognition Committee to develop recognition strategies such as:
- Awards with a diversity theme.
  - Department support for a culture of recognition.

## RESULT MEASURES

How will we know if we are successful at achieving our diversity vision for the Public Works Department? If we can put systems in place that build understanding, resolve conflicts, and celebrate, our workplace will become more diverse. All employees in the Department will experience the workplace as somewhere that they feel:

- Safe;
- Able to do their best work;
- Part of a team;
- Exposed to new ideas and perspectives; and
- Workplace concerns are managed effectively.

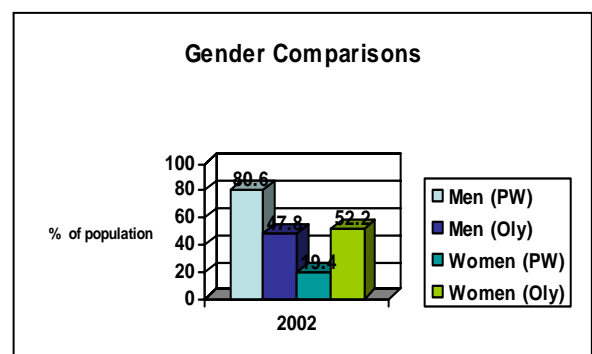
We will measure our success at achieving our diversity vision in three key areas.

### 1. Do We Look Like Our Community?

Both of the charts show how the Public Works Department compares to the Olympia community in the areas of race and gender. This information comes from the 2000 Census and from the City’s Human Resources Department.

#### Gender

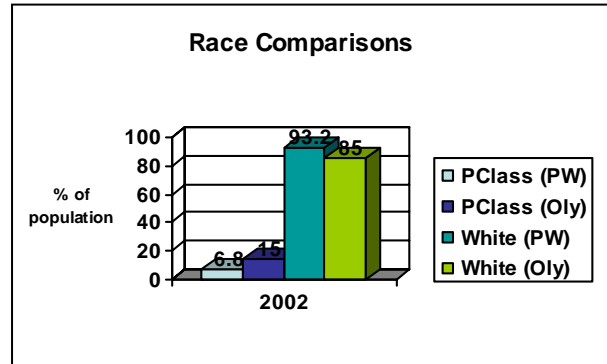
In 2002, 80.6 percent of Public Works employees were male, compared to 47.8 percent males in the Olympia population. Women made up 19.4 percent of the Public Works work place, compared to 52.2 percent in the Olympia population.



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## Race

In 2002, 6.8 percent of Public Works employees were of protected class status (federal designation of racial classes), compared to 15 percent in the Olympia population, while 93.2 percent of Public Works employees were Caucasian, compared to 85 percent in the Olympia population.



## 2. Are Our Recruiting and Selection Efforts Fair and Effective—Free of Barriers to Applicants?

We will evaluate our recruiting efforts by comparing what the applicant pool looks like to our community's composition. We will evaluate our selection efforts by conducting adverse impact analyses following each selection process. This will let us know if a particular group was adversely affected during any stage of the selection process. The information obtained from this analysis will assist us as we develop the next selection process.

## 3. What Are Employees' Attitudes and Feelings?

There are several different ways we can measure and evaluate attitudes and feelings. The Diversity Committee suggests two key elements for this measure:

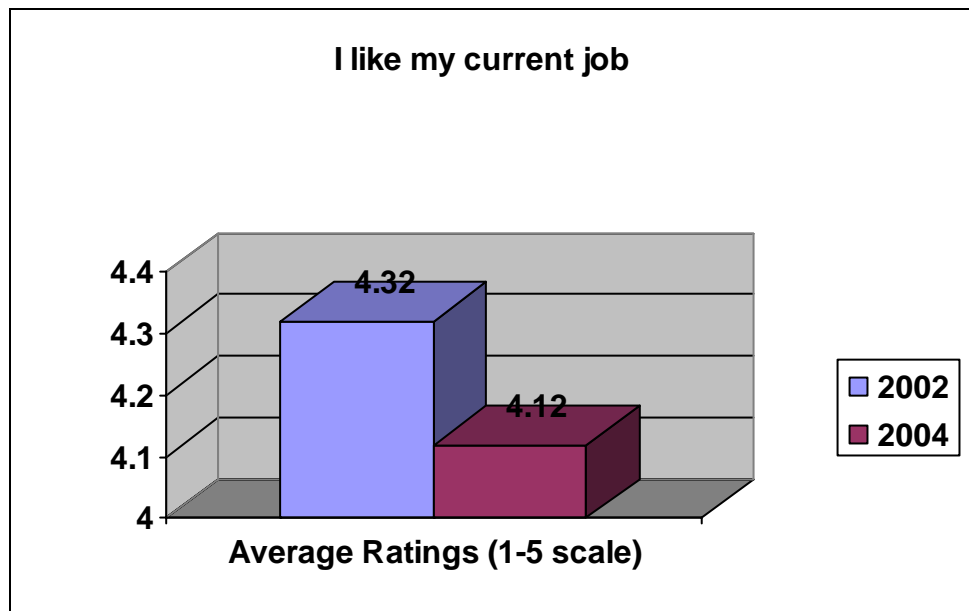
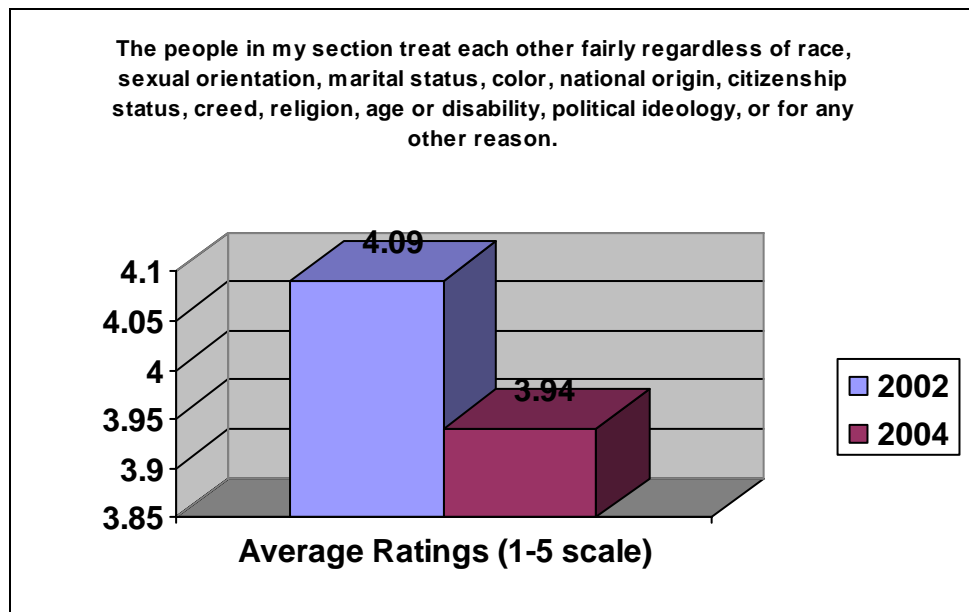
- Regular interviews with new employees and employees who are leaving the organization. Summaries of these interviews will be provided to the Public Works Leadership Team on a quarterly basis from Human Resources.

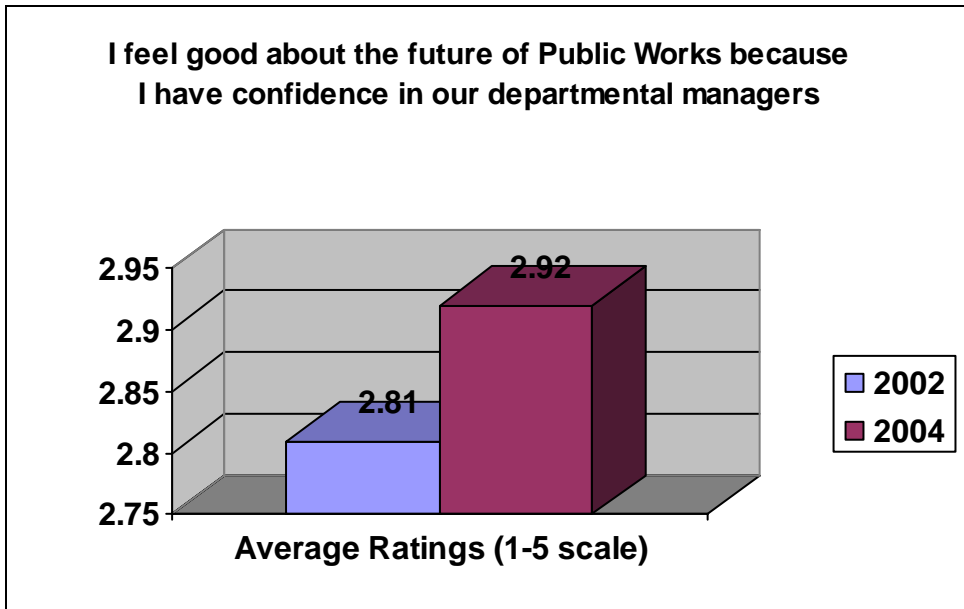
Entry interviews will focus on the employee's impressions of the work environment, and whether their new ideas are well accepted. Exit interviews will probe into the reasons why the employee is leaving the organization.

- Employee surveys conducted every two years with all Public Works employees. The surveys should be anonymous, and can be administered by Human Resources staff at regular Public Works staff meetings. These surveys have been conducted in 2002 and 2004; the next should be in May 2006.

Questions should be consistent year to year for accurate comparison. We should monitor questions from the survey that relate to general satisfaction with job, whether staff feel welcome in their work teams, and alignment between management and employees.

The graphs below report results from 2002 and 2004 surveys for three questions that relate to these issues.





Here are some suggested criteria for focusing improvement efforts:

- Low average scores (less than 3, on a 1 to 5 scale);
- High standard deviations ("greater than 1" should be examined);
- Areas where baseline is changing significantly; and
- Scores in relation to the goals and values of Public Works.

Follow-up to survey results with action plans from supervisors and managers is critical for building employee trust.

## NEXT STEPS

The Committee recognizes that many of these actions will take time and resources. We hope this report can be used as a resource guide to prioritize actions so the Department can achieve its Diversity Vision:

*"Achieve organizational excellence through an environment in which the strengths and differences of each individual are understood, valued, and respected."*

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## RESOURCES

1. *Beyond Race and Gender*, Dr. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., American Management Association, 1991.
2. *Driving out Fear in the Workplace, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Daniel K. Oestreich and Kathleen Ryan, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000.
3. *How to Become an Employer of Choice*, Roger E. Herman and Joyce L. Gioia, Oakhill Press, 2000.
4. *Modern Racism: New Melody for the Same Old Tunes*, Valerie Batts, Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1998.
5. *Welcome!* Bruce Andersen and Dean Paton, Clark County Department of Community Services and Community Activators, Inc., 2000.

E:\Diversity Committee\Diversity Committee Report Outline for Final Draft 030414.doc